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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 107969

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: EG, IS, PINR

SUBJECT: INTSUM 552 - APRIL 27, 1978

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING
PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY
OTHER ADDRESSEES FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION

1. LEBANON. THE LEBANESE PARLIAMENT TODAY WILL DEBATE A SLIGHTLY MODIFIED VERSION OF THE AGREEMENT REACHED ON APRIL 18 BY A SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE REPRESENTING THE MAJOR BLOCS. THE AGREEMENT IS WIDELY VIEWED AS A SUCCESS FOR THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS BECAUSE THEY OBTAINED SIGNIFICANT MUSLIM SUPPORT FOR A PROGRAM ENDORSING UNSC RESOLUTION 425 IN ALL OF ITS ASPECTS, CALLED FOR A CESSATION OF PALESTINIAN AND ANY OTHER ARMED ACTION THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, AND INSISTING THAT THE LEBANESE ARMY BE REBUILT ON A "NATIONAL, HEALTHY AND VIABLE BASIS."

2. INFLUENTIAL CONSERVATIVE MUSLIM POLITICIANS, SUCH AS FORMER SUNNI PRIME MINISTER SAEB SALEM (BEIRUT AND THE SHIITE SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT KAMAL ASSAD (SOUTH LEBANON), APPARENTLY WERE WILLING TO ENDORSE THE AGREEMENT, WHICH IS WIDELY INTERPRETED AS ANTI-PALESTINIAN AND ANTI-LEBANESE

LEFTIST, BECAUSE OF (A) GROWING CONCERN IN THE LEBANESE MUSLIM COMMUNITY OVER THE DOMINANT PALESTINIAN ROLE IN
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MUSLIM AREAS AND (B) FEAR THAT THE CHRISTIANS WERE BECOMING SO FRUSTRATED WITH THE LACK OF POLITICAL PROGRESS THAT THEY MIGHT PUSH FOR PARTITION, WHICH WOULD LEAVE THE CONSERVATIVE MUSLIMS UNDER PALESTINIANS AND LEFTIST DOMINATION.
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3. SUPPORT OF THE CONSERVATIVE MUSLIMS OFFERS THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT AN OPPORTUNITY TO MOVE TOWARD A MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RECONCILIATION. IF THE PARLIAMENT ENDORSES THE AGREEMENT, THE NEXT STEP WOULD BE FOR THE FORMATION OF A NEW COALITION GOVERNMENT THAT USED THE AGREEMENT AS A BLUEPRINT FOR REBUILDING LEBANON.

4. THE LEBANESE LEFTISTS AND THE PALESTINIANS REJECTED THE ACCORD IN A JOINT COMMUNIQUE OF APRIL 24. THEY CLAIMED THAT IT DID NOT PROVIDE A SOLUTION TO LEBANON'S POLITICAL PROBLEMS AND THAT IT FAILED TO CALL "STRONGLY ENOUGH" FOR AN ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM SOUTHERN LEBANON. THEY OBJECTED TO THE FAILURE OF THE AGREEMENT TO CALL FOR REBUILDING OF THE LEBANESE ARMY ON A NON-CONFESSIONAL BASIS, REFLECTING THEIR VIEW THAT THE ARMY IS AN INSTRUMENT DESIGNED TO PRESERVE MARONITE SUPREMACY.

5. MUCH OF THE LEBANESE LEFTIST AND PALESTINIAN OPPOSITION IS BASED ON THEIR PERCEPTION THAT THEIR INFLUENCE HAS DECLINED SINCE THE CIVIL WAR ENDED IN NOVEMBER 1976. WHAT BACKING THEY RETAIN APPEARS TO DERIVE MORE FROM MUSLIM DISTRUST OF THE MARONITES THAN FROM SUPPORT FOR THE PALESTINIANS. THE LOSS OF THEIR BASES IN SOUTHERN LEBANON AND THE UNRELIABILITY OF THEIR LEBANESE ALLIES INCREASES THIS CONCERN.

6. SIMILARLY, THE MUSLIM LEFTISTS SAW THEIR POLITICAL FORTUNES RISE AT THE EXPENSE OF THE ESTABLISHED POLITICIANS DURING THE CIVIL WAR. THE LEFTISTS EXPECTED THAT THEIR INFLUENCE WOULD BE TRANSLATED FROM STREET POWER TO

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A SOLID POLITICAL BASE. INSTEAD, THE TRADITIONAL POLITICIANS HAVE REGAINED MUCH OF THE INFLUENCE THEY HAD LOST. THE TRADITIONAL MUSLIM POLITICIANS ARE THE KEY TO THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF THE CURRENT MOVE TOWARD RECONCILIATION. IF THEY CAN RESIST PALESTINIAN AND LEFTIST PRESSURE AND IF THEY CONTINUE TO SUPPORT SARKIS AND THE APRIL 18 AGREEMENT, THEN A SIGNIFICANT STEP TOWARD THE POLITICAL RESUSCITATION OF LEBANON WILL HAVE BEEN TAKEN. IT REMAINS

TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE TRADITIONAL POLITICIANS WILL HOLD FIRM IN THE FACE OF WARNINGS AND PHYSICAL ABUSE FROM LEFTISTS AND PALESTINIANS.

8. THE CHRISTIANS HAVE LITTLE SYMPATHY FOR THE PREDICAMENT OF THE CONSERVATIVE MUSLIMS. THE CHRISTIANS HAVE LONG WANTED TO FORCE THE MUSLIMS TO CHOOSE BETWEEN SIDING WITH THE PALESTINIANS OR WITH THE CHRISTIANS. IN ORDER TO FACILITATE THIS CHOICE IN THEIR FAVOR, THE CHRISTIANS HAVE CONCILIATORY GESTURES, INCLUDING REMOVING THEIR MILITIAS FROM THE STREETS OF EAST BEIRUT. HOWEVER, IF THE MUSLIMS SIDE WITH THE PALESTINIANS, THE CHRISTIANS, INCLUDING SARKIS, MIGHT CONCLUDE THAT PARTITION IS THE ONLY SOLUTION.

9. THE SELECTION OF A NEW CABINET WILL PROVIDE A GOOD INDICATION OF WHETHER THE CONSERVATIVE MUSLIMS ARE SIDING WITH THE CHRISTIANS OR THE PALESTINIANS, OR WHETHER THEY ARE ATTEMPTING TO STAY IN THE MIDDLE. MUSLIM PARTICIPATION IN THE CABINET WOULD BE A GESTURE TOWARD THE CHRISTIANS; REFUSAL TO JOIN WOULD GIVE THE NOD TO THE PALESTINIANS. PROLONGED NEGOTIATIONS OVER THE CABINET WILL SIGNAL AN EFFORT BY THE CONSERVATIVE MUSLIMS TO AVOID A

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DECISION. THE LATTER COURSE HAS USUALLY BEEN THE NORM.

10. FOR THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS THE BREAKAWAY LAA HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY DEFUNCT. IN THE LAST MONTH, HOWEVER, IT HAS HAD A REVIVAL UNDER FATAH AND LEBANESE NATIONALIST AUSPICES. WE BELIEVE THAT FATAH INTENDS TO USE THE LAA AS A THIN VEIL TO GIVE SOME LEGITIMACY TO PALESTINIAN DE FACTO CONTROL OVER THE AREA BETWEEN THE LITANI AND ZAHRANI RIVERS. (CONFIDENTIAL)

11. SYRIA. THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP APPEARS INCREASINGLY BELEAGUERED BY AN ARRAY OF TROUBLESOME DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES. RATHER THAN ALLOWING SYRIAN POLICIES TO DRIFT, HOWEVER, ASSAD SEEMS DETERMINED TO OUTMANEUVER HIS ADVERSARIES. HE IS REALISTIC ABOUT THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF SOVIET PROFESSIONS OF POLITICAL SUPPORT, AND HE ANTICIPATES INTENSIFIED PRESSURE FROM THE US. HE BELIEVES THAT INCREASED SYRIAN CONTROL OVER THE PALESTINIANS WILL GIVE HIM MORE LEVERAGE IN THE INTER-ARAB CONTEXT AND THUS HELP HIM TO SURMOUNT SYRIA'S CURRENT DIFFICULTIES.

12. IN LEBANON, THE THREAT OF FURTHER CLASHES BETWEEN SYRIAN FORCES AND LEBANESE CHRISTIANS HAS STIMULATED ASSAD POINTEDLY TO REMIND THE LEBANESE AND PALESTINIANS OF THE LIMITS OF SYRIAN PATIENCE. DEFENDING THE RECENT EXCESSES OF SYRIAN TROOPS IN THE BEIRUT SUBURBS, ASSAD STRESSED TO LEBANESE LEADERS THAT HIS ONLY OPTION BESIDES HARSH MEASURES WAS TO WITHDRAW SYRIAN SOLDIERS SO THAT THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT COULD CONFRONT THE VARIOUS PALESTINIAN GROUPS.

13. WHILE THESE THREATS MAY ENCOURAGE LEBANESE AND PALESTINIAN RESPONSIVENESS, EMBASSY DAMASCUS DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT ASSAD HAS YET REACHED THE POINT AT WHICH THE POLITICAL COSTS OF REMAINING IN LEBANON OUTWEIGH THE PRICE OF WITHDRAWAL. ASSAD USES THE WITHDRAWAL THREAT
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ONLY WITH THOSE WHO NEED THE SYRIAN TROOPS IN LEBANON FOR PROTECTION AND NOT WITH THOSE WHO WANT THEM TO LEAVE. MOREOVER, EARLIER THIS WEEK, MINISTER TLASS PUBLICLY REITERATED THAT "SYRIA'S IMMEDIATE SECURITY IS LARGELY LINKED TO LEBANON'S SECURITY, STABILITY AND SAFETY." ASSAD'S APPARENT SUCCESS IN URGING SARKIS AND ARAFAT TO TAKE STEPS TO STABILIZE LEBANON WILL BUY THE SYRIAN

LEADER SOME TIME IN WHICH TO STRENGTHEN HIS DOMESTIC
POLITICAL BASE. SO FAR, BICKERING AMONG HIS SUPPORTERS
HAS KEPT ASSAD FROM BRINGING FRESH FACES INTO THE SYRIAN
CABINET. (CONFIDENTIAL)

14. EGYPT. EMBASSY CAIRO REPORTS THAT WITH THE DEPARTURE,
AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, FROM THE EGYPTIAN ECONOMIC SCENE OF
AILING DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER KAISOUNI (HE HAS GONE
ABROAD FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT), UNCERTAINTIES HAVE
ARISEN WITH RESPECT TO THE FUTURE EGYPTIAN ECONOMIC
POLICY. KAISOUNI MAY RETURN AND THERE MAY BE NO EXODUS
OF ECONOMIC MINISTERS, BUT THIS IS A PARTICULARLY IM-
PORTANT TIME FOR THE EGYPTIANS IN THEIR DEALINGS WITH THE
IMF AND IBRD. A LACK OF CLEAR POLICY DIRECTION NOW COULD
BE ESPECIALLY DAMAGING TO EGYPTIAN ECONOMIC INTERESTS
OVER THE COMING MONTHS. (CONFIDENTIAL) VANCE

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